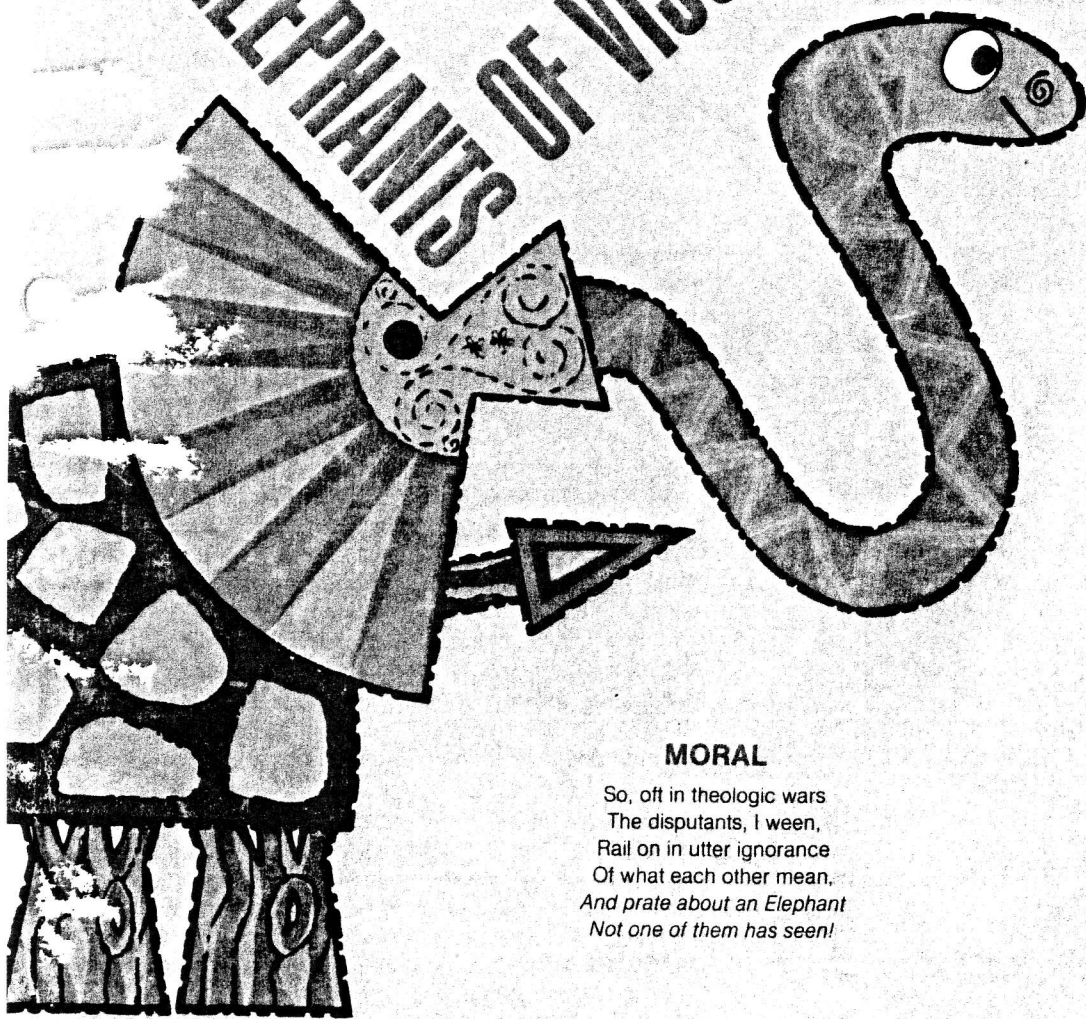




A Supplement
to the Kodak Periodical
VISUALS ARE A LANGUAGE

THE ELEPHANTS OF VISUAL LITERACY



MORAL

So, oft in theologic wars
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT.

A HINDOO FABLE
JOHN GODFREY SAXE

I
It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

II
The *First* approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl;
"God bless me!—but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

III
The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,
Cried: "Ho!—what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

IV
The *Third* approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

V
The *Fourth* reached out his eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

VI
The *Fifth*, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "'E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

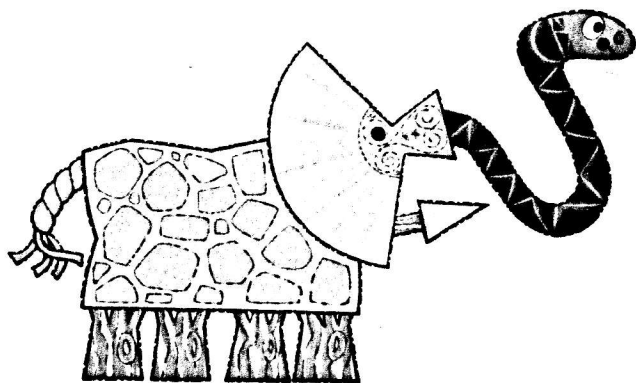
VII
The *Sixth* no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

VIII
And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

WHY VISUAL LITERACY:

Why Visuals? Why Literacy?

VISUAL LITERACY is an elephant. We are like the blind men in the parable, who examined the pachyderm and came up with varying conclusions about the nature of the beast. The term *VISUAL LITERACY* originally referred to the group of skills



that enable an individual to understand and to use visuals for the purposes of intentionally communicating his own messages, or for interpreting and understanding the intentional visual communications of others. However, visual literacy, like a baby elephant, grew.

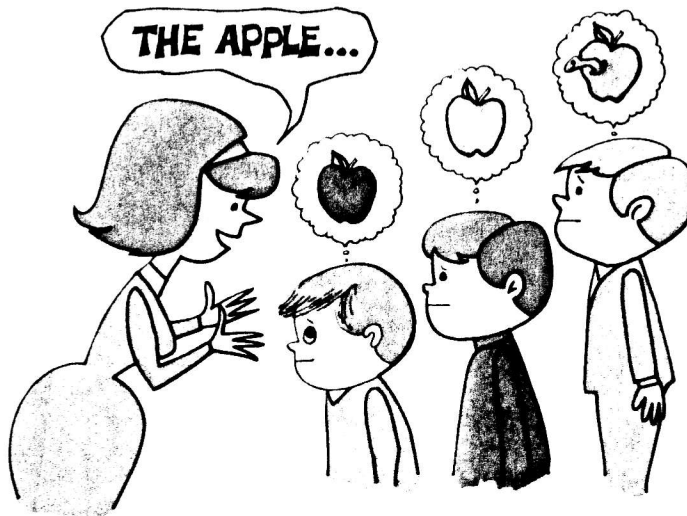
By and by, psychologists, physiologists, educators, computer scientists, and men of medicine were added to the ranks of art and language arts scholars, sociologists, archaeologists, urbanologists, and others who expressed deep concern about

knowing how visual communication affects us and is effected by us. Now the term *VISUAL LITERACY* has as many definitions as it has people defining it. We are encouraged, however, to know that common elements are found among all the definitions. In short, *BECAUSE* people will not tire from sharing ideas, and *BECAUSE* their ideas can be clear and memorable in visual form, there will be long continuing concern for the skills that make an individual deft and clever in crafting visual messages and subtle and sensitive in "reading" and interpreting the visual messages of others.

Why use the word "literacy" in the term *VISUAL LITERACY*? "Literacy" refers to a complex of knowledge, capacities, and skills that an individual can develop for understanding, manipulating, and mastering uses of letters and sounds for recording, conveying and interpreting ideas.

In early times, "literacy" was considered an almost magical possession of the ruling elite. Thus literacy became a tool for shaping the opinions of men and nations. Recently, letters and numbers have been joined to pictures and a new kind of literacy has emerged. The modern literacy must accommodate subtle innuendos. The newspaper picture of an elegantly appointed bedroom, accompanied by letters and numbers saying "Bedroom Suite—\$499.00" brings prospective customers to the store. But the prospective customer soon finds out that the brocade wallpaper, the oriental carpet, the nightstands and lamps, the pictures and drapes, the bedspread, springs, and mattress were not intended to be part of the deal. For his money, he gets only the headboard, two dressers, and a mirror. The reader of the ad was not visually literate enough to know that the bedroom suite in the context of the store would differ from the same suite in the context of his home. By overlooking the basic grammar and semantics of visual statements, we make ourselves vulnerable to error and embarrassment.

We can develop visual literacy by starting from any number of bases. For instance, consider the linguistic structure of a visual utterance. As with words in a verbal expression, visuals can possess a certain stress. In scanning a visual sequence, for example, the coloring or composition of one picture might make it fairly jump out at us. Thus visual utterances may well have verbal equivalents to stress, pitch, and to various transformational or traditional grammatical categories.



The study of semantic relationships between verbal and visual utterances is also fruitful. To every common word in our language we attribute a range of meanings. These meanings differ from person to person, and from one local group to another. The images of objects and people in pictures are semantically similar to words in that we bring to them ranges of meanings that vary among people and places. The scene of an empty rocking chair by the curb differs from that of the rocking chair on the porch, occupied by your grandmother with her needlework in her lap. Thus the image of the chair has ranges of meaning that differ in relation to various surroundings and in relation to the attitudes of the viewers.

Whether you begin developing visual literacy as a mathematician, philosopher, engineer, or psychologist, you may find that visual literacy is an elephant. If you look at the bibliographies in this pamphlet, you will find that your view of visual literacy probably differs significantly from that of others. Therefore, we will not attempt to support any specialized view of visual literacy, nor promote the approach of any particular discipline over any other. Instead, we will view visual literacy as an elephant, which is only what you perceive it to be.

We will concentrate on *photographic* visuals. We will see how they can be created, designed, and presented, and how they can be interpreted to develop visual literacy in individuals. This will by no means be a comprehensive survey of the ways in which photographic visuals can be used as learning tools. We encourage you to experiment with your ideas. After all, visual literacy is an elephant.